

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 HEW-04 EPA-01 AID-05 CEQ-01 CIAE-00
SOE-02 COME-00 DODE-00 EB-08 INR-07 IO-13 L-03
NSF-01 NSC-05 NSAE-00 PM-05 USIA-06 OES-07 SS-15
SP-02 DOE-11 INT-05 AGRE-00 LAB-04 MED-02 /120 W
-----090587 302306Z /75

R 301655Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 268
INFO AMCONSUL MILAN

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SENV, ECEM, IT
SUBJECT: FOLLOW-UP TO THE TOXIC CHEMICAL INCIDENT AT SEVESO

REF: ROME 1363

1. SUMMARY: EMBASSY RECOMMENDS THAT ALL USG AGENCIES CONCERNED (INCLUDING STATE, HEW AND EPA) BE ASKED TO REGARD THE PRIVATE EFFORTS OF A NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES (NAS) COMMITTEE AND A RECENTLY FORMED ITALIAN COMMITTEE AS THE SOLE MECHANISM FOR PURSUING LONG-TERM EPIDEMIOLOGICAL STUDIES AT SEVESO ON A BILATERAL BASIS. USG FINANCIAL AND PERSONNEL SUPPORT FOR THIS INITIATIVE SHOULD BE ENCOURAGED. END SUMMARY.

2. THE EXPLOSION OF THE GIVAUDAN CHEMICAL PLANT AT SEVESO, NEAR MILAN, IN JULY 1976 LED TO EXTENSIVE EXPOSURE OF THE LOCAL POPULATION TO DIOXIN. THE NAS, RESPONDING TO ITALIAN REQUESTS, SENT A SMALL COMMITTEE TO SEVESO IN APRIL 1977 UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF NORTON NELSON (DIRECTOR, INST. ENV. MEDICINE, UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK). AFTER EXTENSIVE DISCUSSIONS, THIS COMMITTEE INDICATED TO THE ITALIANS ITS INTEREST IN CO-OPERATING ON LONG-TERM STUDIES AT SEVESO, PROVIDED THAT A
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HIGH-QUALITY COMMITTEE COULD BE FORMED ON THE ITALIAN SIDE TO ACT AS THE COUNTERPART TO THE NAS COMMITTEE. AFTER EIGHT MONTHS OF SILENCE, THIS SUGGESTION HAS NOW BEEN TAKEN UP BY THE ITALIANS. FRANCESCO POCCHIARI (DIRECTOR, ISTITUTO SUPERIORE DI SANITA') IN A LETTER TO NELSON HAS INDICATED THE FORMATION OF A SEVEN-MEMBER ITALIAN COMMITTEE (INCLUDING FOUR MEMBERS FROM POCCHIARI'S INSTITUTE PLUS FARA AND ZURLO (UNIVERSITY OF

MILAN) AND GARATTINI (MARIO NEGRI INSTITUTE). POCCHIARI'S INSTITUTE HAS NOT PROVED EFFECTIVE IN DEALING WITH THE PROBLEMS AT SEVESO, BUT SINCE THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH (TO WHICH THIS INSTITUTE BELONGS) MAINTAINS A VETO OVER ALL SEVESO-RELATED ACTIVITIES, IT IS ONLY WISE THAT THE INSTITUTE BE INVOLVED. FARA, ZUROLO AND GARATTINI HAVE ALL MADE MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS AT THE LOCAL LEVEL. NELSON BELIEVES THAT THIS COMMITTEE WILL BE SATISFACTORY TO THE MEMBERS OF THE NAS COMMITTEE, WHOM HE IS NOW POLLING.

4. AS THE DEPARTMENT IS AWARE, THE SEVESO INCIDENT IS A VERY SENSITIVE SUBJECT BOTH WITHIN ITALY AND BETWEEN ITALY AND OTHER COUNTRIES. WITHIN ITALY, THERE ARE TWO MAJOR CONFLICTS: FIRST THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT; AND SECOND, THE CONFLICT AT THE LOCAL LEVEL AMONG POLITICAL PARTIES. IN ADDITION, THE EXPOSED POPULATION CONTINUES TO REGARD OUTSIDE INTERVENTION, INCLUDING RESEARCH WORKERS, WITH SUSPICION. ON THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL, ITALIANS ARE SENSITIVE TO CHARGES, INCLUDING JUSTIFIABLE ONES, OF MISMANAGEMENT.

5. NEVERTHELESS, SEVERAL AGENCIES OF THE USG AS WELL AS MANY U.S. PROFESSIONALS HAVE EXPRESSED INTEREST IN STUDIES OF THE LONG-TERM HEALTH IMPACT OF DIOXIN EXPOSURE AT SEVESO. SECRETARY OF HEW CALIFANO EXPRESSED THE INTEREST OF HIS DEPARTMENT, AND ESPECIALLY THE CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL, DURING HIS VISIT HERE LAST NOVEMBER. EPA HAS EXPRESSED ITS INTEREST (REFTEL).
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SCIATT, IN DISCUSSIONS AT THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, HAS FOUND EXTENSIVE INTEREST, COUPLED WITH CONCERN THAT THE USG NOT BE IMPLICATED IN ANY WAY OR OTHERWISE EMBARRASSED.

6. GIVEN THESE USG INTERESTS AND THE ITALIAN SENSITIVITIES, WE BELIEVE THAT THE POCCHIARI-NELSON INITIATIVE PROVIDES THE BEST CURRENT OPPORTUNITY TO LAUNCH A MEANINGFUL, LONG-TERM EPIDEMIOLOGICAL RESEARCH PROJECT AT SEVESO. THE INITIATIVE IS A PRIVATE ONE TAKEN BY THE ITALIANS, SO THE USG IS AT LEAST PARTIALLY PROTECTED FROM ANY CHARGES OF INTERFERENCE. AT THE SAME TIME, THE NAS COMMITTEE, EXPANDED FROM ITS APRIL 1977 FOUR MEMEBERS, COULD DRAW HEAVILY ON EXPERTISE AND FINANCES FROM THE U.S. NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH, THE CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL, EPA AND OTHER PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SOURCES.

7. WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND THAT STATE TAKE THE LEAD IN GETTING OTHER USG AGENCIES TO REGARD THE POCCHIARI-NELSON INITIATIVE AS THE SOLE MECHANISM FOR PURSUING LONG-TERM EPIDEMIOLOGICAL STUDIES AT SEVESO. THE USG WOULD LEND SUPPORT TO THE INITIATIVE, INCLUDING GRANTS AND EXPERTS AS WELL AS USE OF USG FACILITIES TO EXPEDITE COMMUNICATIONS (AS WE DO FOR MANY OTHER PRIVATE RESEARCH EFFORTS). OFFICIALLY, HOWEVER, NO UNITS OF

THE USG WOULD BE DIRECTLY INVOLVED.GARDNER

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